

EXPERIENCED defender Alan Neilson made his first Luton Town start in nearly five months against Plymouth on Saturday.

Neilson slotted into the left-back position to cover for the suspended Sol Davies.

- Minutes on pitch: 90
- Passes to Luton: 19
- Passes to Plymouth: 10
- Pass completion rate: 66 per cent

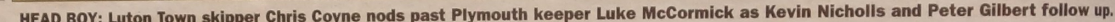
- Tackles won: 5
- Tackles lost: 1
- Free-kicks won: 1
- Free-kicks conceded: 0
- Headers won: 6
- Headers lost: 0
- Shots on target: 0
- Shots off target: 0
- Shots blocked: 0
- Drubbles ball retained: 1
- Drubbles ball lost: 0
- Crosses: 2

VERDICT: Neilson showed little sign of a lack of match practice and instead gave a solid showing against the league leaders.

He was firm in the tackle and strong in the air as shown by his tackles won and headers won categories. Neilson made only very rare flurries upfield. But the former Welsh international showed his organisational skills when the Town were reduced to 10 men.

The fact that his opposing number, Argyle winger Tony Capaldi, was substituted after just 54 minutes told its own story.

NEWELL'S VERDICT: "He showed his experience and did the job required of him as did all the lads. It's just so disappointing for them all with another late goal."



HATTERS 1 PLYMOUTH 1

LUTON skipper Chris Coyne headed his first Hatters goal in six months, but 10-man Town fell to their last-minute curse yet again against the league leaders.

Coyne's 43rd minute goal – his first since netting against Charlton Athletic in the Carling Cup back in September – sent Luton into the interval on a high.

But Kevin Nicholls' dismissal a minute after the break put the Town up against it. Coyne himself was forced to limp off in the 48th minute.

And battling Hatters performed superbly with youth scholar Curtis Davies partnering Emmerson Boyce at the centre of defence.

However, Luton's habit of conceding late goals struck yet again as Plymouth's Steve Adams broke Town fans' hearts by nodding home the equaliser three minutes into injury time with virtually the last touch of the game.

It was a sickening blow to Luton's exhausted players and Coyne admitted it was even more frustrating having to watch events unfold from the touchline.

The 25-year-old told *The News-Gazette*: "It was horrible. It seemed more like an hour and a half not just one half. The lads worked so hard, especially as we were down to 10 men and

Skip courses late leveller

it's just so frustrating. It was just total silence in the dressing room afterwards.

"There wasn't anything more the manager or Mick or Steiny could say. They'd warned us about their set-pieces before the game and I thought we'd defended them well – it was just bad timing for that last one."

On the late goal curse, Coyne continued: "It's happening a bit too regularly now. If we knew what we were doing wrong then obviously we'd stop doing it."

"But we're not the sort of bunch that will let it get us down. We were disappointed on Sunday and Monday, but we don't just sit and look at what's happened previously and by Friday we'll be up for the QPR game."

Coyne himself now faces a fitness battle after straining ligaments in his left ankle. The Aussie stopper has been undergoing treatment and rates himself "50-50" to make the Loftus Road clash.

He said: "I've been having treatment on it each morning and I'm just going to

take it easy now and give myself every chance of making the QPR game."

Coyne's injury came in the 17th minute when he landed awkwardly after a challenge with Plymouth's former Watford forward Nathan Lowndes.

But after receiving treatment off the field, he bravely battled on as Luton bossed the opening 25 minutes without creating any clear openings.

David Frieo headed wastefully wide for Argyle from Paul Connolly's cross in the 27th minute before Enoch Showunmi deflected Peter Holmes' drive onto the outside of the post for Luton three minutes later.

Friio was booked for diving in the Town penalty area a minute later and Morten Hyldgaard somehow blocked Lowndes' volley from point-blank range.

in the 35th minute. But Coyne put Luton ahead when he stole in at the far post to head home Steve Robinson's free-kick.

Nicholls' sending off came just 30 seconds into the second-half. Hyldgaard was penalised for holding on to the ball too long and as Lowndes rushed to take a quick free-kick he clashed with Nicholls and tumbled to the ground.

The Luton hard man was immediately shown the red card for raising his hands towards the Plymouth front man.

Howard twice threatened as Luton, inspired by the superb Robinson, raised their game. Visiting substitutes Marino Keith and Martin Phillips both went close before Paul Wotton's corner set up Adams' scrambled last-gasp goal.

STAR HATTER: Steve Robinson. Covered the work of two players after the break.

MIKE NEWELL'S VERDICT



"THE late goals are becoming very difficult to take. It's not just happening in the last minutes, it's the last kick.

"It can't always be down to bad defending; sometimes it's just bad luck."

"We had to battle, but that's what happens when you're down to 10 men."

"We had the better of the

first-half in difficult conditions. We created more and deserved the lead.

"We felt we'd done enough in the second-half. But when that happens in

"We had it won and it's no good thinking how well

we played. The lads are gutted and we need to pick them up for next week now."

If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try